MEGACARTOONS FOR THE MASSES

Cartoons used to parody the absurdities and accesses of everyday socio-political life, but with the advent of the mega-cartoons of the eighties we have seen a reversal. Real life now parodies the cartoon world. Who wants to hear about reality? Homelessness, AIDS, drug addiction, suicide, incest, child-molesting priests, lawsuits over remembered incest, plane crashes, earthquakes, tornados, blizzards, oil spills, toxic waste pollution, mass murder--oy, the talk shows drain the populace daily with endless discussions of subjects once considered private. Today's tragedy is tomorrow's tv movie. How to write a great novel about character when modern telemarketing techniques have changed character into consumer? The choices of the average person are meaningless. If you sit at a terminal, what difference does it make whether you sit in the Metropolitan Life Building or in the Transamerica pyramid? Super movies about superheroes like Superman and Batman proved popular in the eighties because the average person lives in fear and needs the fantasy of someone invulnerable and incorruptible to sustain everyday life. Not a day goes by that we don't read about a drive-by shooting or a hold-up or a mass murder or a gang assault. Don't worry. The megamarketeers will send **THE SHADOW** to protect you. **THE FLINTSTONES** will make you laugh. **THE TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES** will teach your kids how to speak intelligently about pizza and the **MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS** will protect them from muggers and kidnappers and child pornographers. Territorial wars are television shows that spare you the details like bodybags and burning villages that made the War in Viet Nam unpopular in the 1960s. People are being murdered every day in Central America and Iraq, but tv won't trouble you with that news. Big Brother [Time-Warner/Disney] will take care of you. **SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS** will be out on video October 28th in time for your Christmas shopping. Robin will join Batman in the next megacartoon. Arnold Schwartzenegger will get pregnant in **JUNIOR**.

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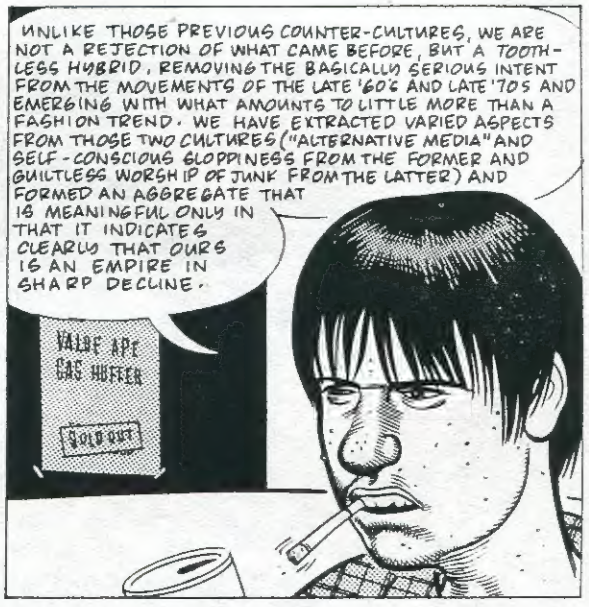
DENNIS THE MENACE: ADULTS ONLY

It seems to be in to trash adults, particularly parents, and the movies that continue to wallow in this unhealthy trend are often made by adult parents. Call it the Home Alone Syndrome. A smartass kid who ought to be tied to a chair and fed a straight diet of tofu and garbanzo beans is left alone in the family home. In a short period of time he manages to destroy nearly everything, particularly any hapless adults who wander near him. Take John Hughes version of **DENNIS THE MENACE**; we're in major adult-trash mode here, dudes. As Mr. Wilson, Walter Mathau is routinely tortured for over an hour and a half. This movie is about as funny as **THE EXORCIST** and gives none of the satisfaction. It's filmed like a horror film. The demonic kid who knows everything and is only interested in destruction, the more violent and bloody the better, skips happily from adult victim to adult victim with an ax or a butcher knife in his hand until he is violently eviscerated in the last minute or two of the film. Only this is suburban sitcom, not teen horror, and cute little Dennis is not punished by being sent back to hell where he belongs; after ruining Mr. Wilson's garden party and nearly crippling the man in one cruel incident after another, he is allowed to return to his nerdy parents to await the sequel. And you know any movie this rotten will be remade. Why did I hate this movie? Why didn't I think it was funny when Dennis ruined all the food for the party and sat their grinning? Why didn't I laugh at the final image, a burning marshmallow stuck in the center of Mr. Wilson's forehead? Why did I see the poor man moaning in pain in intensive care, his hair and eyebrows and lashes burned off, His wife wondering how she will manage their big house all by herself? Why didn't I crack up with laughter earlier when Dennis spilled mothballs all over the attic floor and Mr. Wilson slipped on them and fell to break his back and rupture his spinal cord? That's really funny stuff, Hughes. I'm sure the parents who got this movie to show their kids died laughing.

I still like Hank Ketcham's little panel, but I suspect he hated this film as much as I did. I wish I could think of something good to say about it, but this is a cruel, mean-spirited, violent film, and anyone who shows it to a child needs counseling. A pratfall can be funny. Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton did them well in their early movies, but they always got up afterwards. When a man Walter Mathau's age slips and falls, he does not get up and smile and walk away, nor is he seen to do so in **DENNIS THE MENACE**. He would be seriously hurt. That's the difference, Hughes. After a few minutes, I began to see Dennis as a serious threat to Mr. Wilson's life, not as a mischeivous little boy having some fun at the expense of an adult. Watching him pouring cleaning fluid in a bottle of nose drops, I felt like I was watching **CHILD'S PLAY 2**, not a comedy. If this film isn't rated R, one can only wonder about the constituency of the Board.

The University of Mississippi Press has republished Arthur Asa Berger's 1969 dissertation. **LI'L ABNER: A STUDY IN AMERICAN SATIRE**. The book sells for $14.95. Info 1-800-737-7788.


UNLIKE THOSE PREVIOUS COUNTER-CULTURES, WE ARE NOT A REJECTION OF WHAT CAME BEFORE, BUT A TOOTH-LESS HYBRID, REMOVING THE BASICALLY SERIOUS INTENT FROM THE MOVEMENTS OF THE LATE '60S AND LATE '70S AND EMERGING WITH WHAT AMOUNTS TO LITTLE MORE THAN A FASHION TREND. WE HAVE EXTRACTED VARIED ASPECTS FROM THOSE TWO CULTURES ("ALTERNATIVE MEDIA" AND SELF-CONSCIOUS SLOPPINESS FROM THE FORMER AND GUILTLESS WORSHIP OF JUNK FROM THE LATTER) AND FORMED AN AGGREGATE THAT IS MEANINGFUL ONLY IN THAT IT INDICATES CLEARLY THAT OURS IS AN EMPIRE IN SHARP DECLINE.
VALUE APT CAR WASHER
SOLD OUT

One panel reason why I enjoyed EIGHTBALL 13. Buy a copy! C.G.

Q-ZAR IN BERKELEY?

Lately, there has been a debate over whether or not to let Reality World open Q-ZAR in our town. On one side are those people who think controlled games of laser tag are like boot camp for serial killers. On the other are those who say this is just a game like any other, so why shouldn't it be allowed?

When I was a kid, we wore guns on our hips and went around shooting each other every afternoon after school. The guns were toys and they were normally empty unless we had some caps left over from the 4th of July. The fantasies came to us from Western and gangster movies our Dads took us to on Friday nights. My fantasy self was usually Tim Holt or Billy the Kid or The Lone Ranger. I was always the good guy because I was the oldest and controlled the game. The younger kids were the bad guys and I relished shooting them over and over again. My Dad had several real guns around the house. He had a nice police .38 revolver with a silver handle that I often got out and played with when he wasn't around. It was never loaded or there would have been a few neighborhood kids missing from the local phone book. I'd spin the barrel and click the chamber. I liked the pistol, but I didn't care anything about the 30.06 rifle or the .12 gauge shotrun. My Dad was the mighty hunter. Him and my Uncle Jack. I hated hunting and never went when I could get out of it. One day the guns were gone. I don't know where they went, probably sold to a pawn shop in one of our moments of need, but I never saw them again. And I didn't really care or give it much thought. If toy guns came along at Christmastime, I'd play with them until they were broken or some more interesting game came along. I never bought a gun myself and have had no interest in them since childhood.

So I would be one of those people suggesting that laser tag is just a game kids play, a symbolic way of getting revenge on parents and other people who get in the way of the developing ego, not something to be too concerned about. If a kid is playing Q-ZAR in downtown Berkeley, he is not out holding up a 7-11 or driving around taking pot shots at homeless people. It's not that I *like* to see kids playing violent video games or virtual reality simulations--I don't--but I'm not too concerned that they do either.

Violence, the real violence, to me, is when someone is deprived of the chance at meaningful work then blamed for not doing it. And I don't mean the chance to sell junk food for four hours for less money than a businessman spends on a single taxi fare. To deal with violence, we have to deal with the frustration that causes it, not worry about the video or virtual reality games that arise as safety valves.

Doesn't an artificial image depend upon an actual image and isn't it a function of art to parody precursors?

-Egon Schiele, 1912.

Dear Clay,

I'd never heard of McTits, but when I visited Melbourne a few years back I saw several streets and stores named after Batman--John Batman [an Australian friend living in Anchorage tells me John Batman established Melbourne after sailing up the Yarra River to the city's present site; wonder why the city isn't called Batman, but I think founders were more modest in those days, naming places after the queen's officials].

--Jerry Riddle
Anchorage, Alaska

VIRTUAL BABY

Ever wonder what your kids might look like if you had decided to have some? Well, **BABYMAKER** shows you a preview. The program, designed by Greg Deocampo, made the rounds in the Bay Area recently, a travelling multimedia Electric Carnival. To check our your future offspring, you get your face and your mate's scanned into an image file. The faces are merged or blended and the result is pasted onto Baby. Voila! Doesn't work that way in unvirtual reality, where a dominant gene from the deep past might show up making your baby look more like a distant ancestor than either parent, but...I like **FRANKENFACE**. In this one, concert-goers can merge parts of their own face with grotesque face parts from a computer database. You can be anybody or anything you want in cyberspace--symbolically, anyway.

Wes Wilson in **BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS**: "With printing and everything, *I got somewhere around seventy-five bucks for a poster*. There were probably five hundred printed on fourteen by twenty paper, pretty much some kind of vellum-y stock that was cheap. The main thing was money because you couldn't really afford to do anything fancy. The inking was black and white or a single color. Of course, the washup took time and that was an additional factor. From the seventy-five, I would make about forty-five bucks. So about probably eight hours of work. . .He thought it was so great. He was really impressed. Here he had shelled out, I think it was like fifty or sixty bucks, and he got all these posters and it was just a real knockout Everybody loved it. He got excited because it just really got his thing happening and I could tell he was going to call me for everything he needed after that. And I was happy about that. I only needed to do two a week to cover my expenses. Eighty-five to a hundred dollars a week [162]." And Bill Graham: "I used him on the early posters and *he would get a hundred and fifty or two hundred of two hundred and fifty for each one* [162]."

Watch for Howard Cruse's **STUCK RUBBER BABY**, a 224 page graphic autobiographical novel.

Marvel's Force Works 1 features the first pop-up comic book cover I have seen, which is about the only reason I can think of for collecting this imitative book.

BABY SUE marches on, now in magazine format. V. 4, No. 3, is $3.73 from POB 1111, Decatur, GA 30031-1111.

Tired of looking at the desktop? Rather watched chickens throwing eggs? Delrina Corporation has created a Screen Saver based on one of Gary Larsen's **FAR SIDE** panels. $25. Check your computer outlet.

S. Clay Wilson did the cover for Jon A. Jackson's **BLIND PIG**. Don't recall if I mentioned that to you before. The book came out in 1988 and has been remaindered locally. During Prohibition [1920-33], A Blind Pig was a speakeasy or small unmarked bar where people went to drink cocktails. And cocktails, incidentally, have no relation to cocks [roosters]. The term originated on the show horse circuit and referred to the cocked tails of the horses. The term became popular in novels in the mid-twenties and in magazines like **SMART SET**.